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C O N F I D E N T I A L MANAMA 001684

SIPDIS

FROM THE AMBASSADOR  
STATE FOR: U/S GREEN,NEA/FO, NEA/ARPI, NA/EX, NEA/PI, A/FO,  
A/OPR/OS  
DEPARTMENT OF NAVY FOR CNO ADMIRAL VERNON CLARK  
DOD FOR U/S FEITH, DUSD/NESA, DOD/ISA, DOD/OSD/PNR, DODEA  
CENTCOM FOR GEN. ABIZAID AND POLAD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/07/2014

TAGS: PREL ASCH AMGT BA

SUBJECT: BAHRAIN SCHOOL: PRESERVE THE DOD CONNECTION

Classified By: Ambassador William T. Monroe. Reason: 1.5 (D)

¶1. (C) We now face, as we did last summer, an urgent decision regarding the DODEA-sponsored Bahrain School: should we continue to support it as a DODEA school, or should we begin the process of conversion to a more traditional international school. While the school does indeed fit the profile of an international school, especially in the absence of Navy dependents, strong policy reasons argue for a continuation of DODEA sponsorship, which has created a unique institution in the Arab and Muslim world. I strongly urge that on policy grounds a decision be made now to continue the school beyond this year as a DODEA institution.

¶2. (C) The Bahrain School has been an important part of the landscape of our bilateral relationship for over 35 years. Its importance goes far beyond that of an educational institution. It serves as a symbol of the positive role that the U.S. Navy plays in Bahrain. It has educated key members of Bahrain's political, economic, and security leadership, who are now sending their children there. It has played a central role in instilling American values and attitudes in Bahrainis who are key supporters of our bilateral relationship. The 9/11 Commission calls for the establishment of a fund to build and operate schools in the Muslim world. We already have a model school in Bahrain, run by the U.S. Department of Defense, widely appreciated by Bahrainis, and teaching the values of the American education system. To pull the plug now simply does not make sense from a policy perspective.

¶3. (C) Transition to a traditional international school is an option from a purely educational point of view. The Bahrain International School Association (BISA) is, in fact, exploring that option if DODEA withdraws its support. The BISA Board and the Government of Bahrain have been unequivocal, however, that their strong preference is for the Bahrain School to remain a DODEA institution.

¶4. (C) If we decide to withdraw DODEA sponsorship of the school, we must be clear about what we will lose:

-- cutting the DOD ties may in time lead to an erosion of support for our Navy presence in Bahrain.

-- we will lose a powerful symbol of the positive benefit of official U.S.-Bahrain engagement, and of the U.S. military presence here.

-- we will no longer be able to guarantee the current quality of education provided by the Bahrain School if/when the U.S. Navy decides to bring any dependents back to Bahrain.

-- future generations of Bahraini students will not develop the bonds towards the U.S. and its Navy that the school has so successfully nurtured.

-- an international school, without the DODEA affiliation, simply will not have the same positive impact on bilateral relations that the existing school has.

¶5. (C) Coming on the heels of the decision last summer by the Navy to remove its dependents from Bahrain, a decision to withdraw DODEA support for the school will raise doubts, both in the government but also among the Bahraini public in general, about the strength of the U.S. commitment to Bahrain. They will wonder if this is the start of disengagement from Bahrain.

¶6. (C) The presence of DOD's Bahrain School has served U.S. policy well over the years. Withdrawing USG support of this landmark institution at a time when the U.S. is engaged in a battle for the hearts and minds of the people in the region would risk throwing away much of the goodwill and positive influence that the school has helped accrue over the years, and foreclose potential opportunities for the future. I truly hope we can make the policy decision to maintain the school as a DODEA institution.

MONROE